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ABSTRACT

To explicate the relevance of cultural context to educational administration practices, this paper contrasts United States cultural attitudes and administrative practices with those of Latin America. Drawing on Leslie A. White's definition of culture, the author presents the Weberian model of administration as exemplary for the United States, reproduces M. K. Whyte's outline of contrasts and similarities between Western and Maoist conceptions of organizations, and contrasts the United States' high status, dependent perspective with the low status, dependent perspective of Latin America. Subsequent sections compare the cultural context of administration in Latin American countries to flea markets, which appear and disappear in random or loosely structured patterns, have varied lifespans, and emphasize interpersonal transactions over efficiency. Latin Americans, the author claims, value planning, organizing time, and workflow charts less highly than interpersonal relationships. The author concludes by arguing that as United States consultants decrease their personal interactions with Latin Americans they will be expected to provide "bargains" in the form of increased allocations of material goods that run contrary to the intent of self-help programs. (JBM)

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THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ADMINISTRATION

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The Cultural Context of Administration

Educational administration has historically developed from management and administration in other organizational settings. Monahan (1975) writes that administration is much older than management. He claims, "administration refers more appropriately to the conduct of public rather than private activities (1). Additionally, he makes the distinction that administration's "primacy is rooted more in the sociocultural fabric of peoples." This contrasts with management in that its "set of activities" are more "directly traceable to economics and secondarily to social process and to cultural phenomena" (1).

Increasingly educational administrators from the United States have been called upon by Latin American countries' educational leaders to provide aid in various areas. Most commonly, the areas of service sought are in: decision making, budgetin procedures, communication and the implementation of technological programs. These common requests are presumed by those from the United States to require rational technological know-how to fulfill them. The increasing dilemma has been to explain why delivering the services to Latin American countries becomes problematic. The problems arise with the two parties negotiating the request and continue through the process of implementation. The party delivering is unable to do so without numerous adjustments, cancellations and renogiations. The party receiving expresses disappointment, find the services unacceptable, renegotiate and/or cancel

the services altogether. These difficulties have led to educational administrators examining the processes by which educational administration operates in cultural contexts.

This paper is an attempt to explicate how the cultural context is related to educational administration practices. The countries' cultures which are contrasted are the United States and Latin America. The cultural context which is specifically investigated is that related to the educational systems' organization.

The Cultural Context

Culture has been defined in many ways by the leading anthropologists. For example, Tylor's (1881) definition has been one of the most enduring. He wrote, "Culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (54). Foster (1962) includes in his definition the notion of a learned way of life: "Culture can be thought of as the common, learned way of life shared by the members of a society, consisting of the totality of tools, techniques, social institutions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations and systems of value known to the group" (11).

In the present case, the definition of culture which is being used comes from White (1972). She writes, "Culture, then, is a class of things and events, dependent upon symboling, considered in an extrasomatic context" (3). The "class of things and events" to be examined are those related to educational administration practice. By symboling, we are applying White's explanation. "By 'symboling' we mean bestowing meaning upon a thing or an act, or grasping and appreciating meanings thus bestowed" (6). For

example, decision making processes or communication patterns, which are common properties of organizations. "Symboling is a kind of behavior" (6). In this case, the behavior looked at is that related to administration. This class of "things or events" will be considered in an extrasomatic context, "i.e., in terms of their relationship to other things and events rather than in relationship to human organisms" (White, 1972:7). In other words, our definition of culture is applicable to both the United States and Latin America. Their contexts will be contrasted in terms of their

1) class of things and events,

2) symboling of things and events, and

3) extrasomatic context.

Many scholars have attempted to contrast cultures across countries and regions. In educational administration, the contrasts have been drawn usually against the Weberian model. Therefore, the Weberian model is now being presented to illustrate the fundamental organizational cultural context in the United States.

1. Process specialization of tasks. Efficiency can be attained by subdividing any operation into its elements. These partial tasks can be taught, expertness in their execution can be readily attained, and responsibility for their performance can easily be fixed.

2. Standardization of role performance. As tasks become fractionated, their performance becomes standardized. There is one best way to perform a task, and it should be taught and enforced. Such institutionalization of functions also protects against costly blunders. At higher levels in the organization the same logic

is followed by prescribing not only the purpose of the role but the means for achieving this purpose.

3. Unity of command and centralization of decision making. The organization is conceived of as a machine, but it is not necessarily self-directing. To maintain the coordination of the whole, decisions must be centralized in one command, and to attain perfect coordination there should be person-to-person responsibility down the line. There should be no bypassing of a hierarchical level as messages are relayed up and down the line. To further insure unity of command there must be a limited span of control, so that no person at any hierarchical level has more immediate subordinates than he or she can control.

4. Uniformity of practices. Not all behavior in the organization can be prescribed by task standardization. Much behavior must be controlled by the specification of uniform institutionalized practices. Thus the same personnel procedures should be followed with respect to all individuals in a given status.

5. No duplication of function. One part of the organization should not duplicate functions being performed by another. Operations for the whole organization should be centralized. The army, navy, and air forces should not have separate purchasing departments. Different departments in an enterprise should not have their own travel and transportation units but should have their needs met by one centralized section.

6. Rewards for merit. Selection and promotion of personnel should be on the basis of technical proficiency for the task and

achievement in its performance. This means recruiting and upgrading people for performance and formal qualifications, not on the basis of personal friendship nor ascribed status. Membership in a social class or race is irrelevant; in theory meritocracy replaces either personal or institutional favoritism.

7. Depersonalization of office. The office is independent of the particular incumbent, who is responded to not because of personal attributes but because he or she occupies an official position with limited and prescribed perogatives. (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 260-261).

The application of the Weberian model results in a "system that is universalistic rather than particularistic." The system is "governed by rules and regulations and not by individuals." Presumably, "all people are entitled to equal treatment under the law and equity becomes a central concept in Weberian bureaucracy" (Katz and Kahn, 1978:261).

Within this system it has been widely acknowledged that the strength of it is lodged in the production side of it. The maintenance side, on the other hand, is largely ignored. The maintenance side includes, "the rewards and returns for staying in the system, the socialization of people in the system, and the recruitment of people for elite positions. "In the managerial and maintenance subsystem the meritocracy of the production subsystem is diluted by particularism and ascription" (263). However, in general, most organizations in the United States would be rational, bureaucratic, technical and universal.

To illustrate differences, Whyte (1973:157) contrasts the Weberian and the Maoist conceptions of organizations.

CONTRASTS

Western conceptions	Maoist conceptions
1. Use criteria of technical competence in personnel allocation	1. Use both political purity and technical competence
2. Promote organizational autonomy	2. Politics takes command, and openness to outside political demands
3. Legal-rational authority	3. Mass line participative-charismatic authority
4. Informal social groups unavoidably occur	4. Informal groups can and should be fully coopted
5. Differentiated rewards to office and performance encouraged	5. Differentiated rewards to office and performance deemphasized
6. Varied compliance strategies needed, depending on the organization	6. Normative and social compliance should play the main role everywhere
7. Formalistic impersonality	7. Comradeship
8. Unemotionality	8. Political zeal encouraged
9. Partial inclusion and limited contractual obligations of office-holders	9. Near total inclusion and theoretically unlimited obligations
10. Job security encouraged	10. Job security not valued, and career orientations not encouraged
11. Calculability through rules and established procedures	11. Flexibility and rapid change valued, rules and procedures looked on with suspicion
12. Unity of command and strict hierarchy of communications.	12. Collective leadership and flexible consultation

SIMILARITIES

Western conceptions	Maoist conceptions
1. Organizations have specific goals	1. Same
2. Organizations utilize a hierarchy of specialized offices	2. Same
3. Authority and rewards greater at the top of an organization	3. Same, although efforts to de-emphasize
4. Universalistic hiring and promotion criteria	4. Same, although criteria differ
5. Files, rules, and written communications regulate organizational life	5. Same, although not always viewed positively
6. Offices separated from office-holders	6. Same

(From Whyte, 1973: 157).

For example, instead of valuing technical competence for appointment, the Chinese would place great weight on political beliefs. Another difference is the placement of social values as primary in China rather than technology.

Lotto(1983) presents a contrast between the industrialized United States and the Zen perspective of organizations. She writes that Zen ideology emphasized the "humanness of such enterprises." Organizing is, therefore, viewed in terms of "relationships, honor, and obligation." Time is a "neutral variable, patience a virtue. Cooperation and participation are real concepts not empty admonitions." Additionally, the formal organizational structure is understood to be primarily formal, for external adornment and appreciation, and not necessarily integral to the workings of the organization" (10-11).

The dependency theory is one of the most extensive depicting Latin America's organizational development. It views Latin America as "locked through an international division of labor into a subordinate status within the world capitalist economic system" [the United States] (Sloan, 1977:23). The dependency is based on the lack of Latin America's "resources to create or choose alternative ways of responding to the constraints impinging upon them" (23). Moreover, this theory explains that "instead of challenging dependency, the Latin American bourgeoisie has accommodated itself to it" (28). In other words, Latin American industrialists and other leaders have become "associates, partners, bureaucrats, suppliers, and clients of mixed foreign-Latin American enterprises and groups, which becloud and obscure Latin American national interests and - more important - increasingly tie the personal economic interests of the individual Latin American industrialist to the [capitalists]" (28).

To summarize, the cultural context of Latin America and the United States differs in the class of things and events to be contrasted, the symboling of them and the extrasomatic context. The United States' educational administration practices' symboling includesrationality, high technology, bureaucracy and universalism. Latin America's symboling, on the other hand, includes infra-structure, i.e., the bourgeoisie and the others, low technology, dependence and particularism. These classes of things and events are related to each other in a different way in each country. The United States relates each of these aspects from a high status and independence. Latin America, in contrast, relates them from a low status and dependence. These are the conditions under which both countries attempt educational administration practices.

Cultural Context Metaphor

The cultural context of administration in Latin American countries may be best understood through the metaphor of the flea market. Flea markets thrive in low technology areas and as intense competitive (exotic) counterparts in high technology environments. Their natural characteristics enable them to originate and prosper.

Flea markets may be described as highly diversified in the quality of products available, in the manner by which the products are displayed and marketed, in the range of prices and in the manner by which sales may be transacted. Most importantly, interpersonal relationships play a major part in the exchange between the sellers and buyers.

There is an additional characteristic which is peculiar to this context. Both parties involved, buyers and sellers, seek "bargains." The seller attempts to get the highest "price" for his/her goods and it may involve "shady" as well as "respectable" practices to obtain it. The buyer seeks the lowest "price" for a product. He may apply "honest" as well as "dishonest" means to obtain the product. This search for a bargain is complicated by the fact that interpersonal relationships hold a premium in the "negotiating process." Therefore, relatives, significant others, and otherwise personalized transactions are more likely to obtain better bargains than others. In this sense, efficiency, effectiveness, goals and other organizational objectives are irrelevant. Instead, interpersonal transaction characteristics assume primacy. For example, "es buena gente" is a common way of describing those with whom a successful bargain has been transacted.

As stated earlier, United States educational administrators are solicited to provide aid in educational institutions. This request comes

from the "bourgoisie" system within Latin America. The aid is to be delivered to the "other" system.

Lotto (1983) writes that one of the critical components in which high technology and industrial and low technology and non-industrial organizations differ is the presence of organizational goals. By organizational goals we are using Parsons' (1937) definition. Organizational goals refer to a "state of affairs, which the organization is attempting to realize. A goal is an image of a future state, which may or may not be brought about" (44).

In low technology and non-industrial countries, goals are replaced by individual transactions. These transactions have the following aspects which impact upon administrative practices: 1) the nature of exchanges, e.g., planned, unplanned, systematically scheduled, random, intense, emotionless, frequent, infrequent, short, long, sporadic and sustained; 2) the efficiency of the exchange, e.g., the quality of the interaction, did both sides feel equitably rewarded for their contributions? Did status enter into the relationship?; 3) the incentives offered, e.g., what is the purpose of the exchange? What do the parties receive as a result of the exchange? and 4) the transaction costs, e.g., what are the costs incurred by each side in order to assure equity? (Lotto, 1983:14-15).

As presented before, the United States and Latin America differ in status. Also, their relationship to each other is based on Latin America's dependency on the United States for aid. In order to describe the working relationship which develops the metaphor of the flea market is applied. Both countries, then, relate to each other under this structure.

The Nature of Exchanges

Flea markets appear and disappear in random or loosely structured patterns. Their lifespan is likewise varied. Their size fluctuates in relation to the degree to which interpersonal transactions can be created and maintained. Moreover, this characteristic of temporariness and ambiguity legitimizes different types of interpersonal transaction. The nature of these transactions, therefore, vary from exchange to exchange. In fact, the nature of the exchanges determine to a great degree the flea markets' successes. Because the exchanges are interpersonal and because individual transactions replace goals, the frequency and duration of these exchanges are critical contributors to their continued existence. The implications for administrative practice is that the success of these organizations in these countries is due to the high degree of individual transactions rather than products produced or tasks accomplished. This runs contrary to most bureaucratic, rational administrative behavior. United States agents would expect to see an increase in task and goal fulfillment in successful organizations. However, if the nature of the exchange is understood in the context of a flea market, what is witnessed can be used to buttress the relationships to the completion of a given project.

For Latin Americans, interpersonal relationships and interpersonal interaction is the class of things and events which serve as commodities in the process of educational administration practice. This class of things and events is symboled as "buena gente" and " y como no?" The meaning attached to these interpersonal transactions is twofold: 1) the person's quality is assessed and 2) the transaction is viewed as possessing possibilities. The meaning is further related, and this is where the flea market metaphor

aids in understanding this relationship, to the overall conception of "bargain." The Latin American, looking for a bargain, decides at this point if there is one or not. The efficiency or the quality of exchange is, therefore, affected to the degree that interpersonal transactions are compromised in favor of task accomplishment and goal fulfillment.

The Efficiency of the Exchange

As stated before, the quality of the interpersonal exchange is to maximize both sides' contributions, but consistent with the culture and flea market characteristics, they must feel equitably rewarded for their contributions. What this means is that the exhange is a "working," "participative" and equal status relationship. The exchange is jeopardized when either party feels subservient, "taken," or presumed upon. Latin Americans, however, consistent with the flea market behavior, will constantly strive to behave so as to "feel equitably rewarded for their contributions." Their search for equity contributes to high technology, industrialized western countries to describe Latin Americans' propensity to "get even." Thus, specialists responding to the need to fulfill goals or accomplish tasks by planning, scheduling, supervising and evaluating directly affect the efficiency or quality of the exchange.

The incentives offered

As can be seen from the above, for Latin Americans, or consistent with the flea market metaphor, one of the major purposes of organizing is interpersonal interaction or transaction. Therefore, all other incentives entering in are secondary. But, the absence of the primary incentive requires that the purpose of the exchange, then, be specific, material and immediate. This explains why transactions with Latin America include requests for moneys, equipment, services and other specific material goods. The transaction by its nature requires that parties receive "something" as

a result of the exhange. For Latin Americans, this becomes the purpose of the exchange. The implications for administrative practice is that if the nature and quality of the exchange are unsatisfactory, the result of the exchange must include the acquisition of "something." Moreover, the acquisition is the purpose. Implementation, utilization, and acceptance require new exchanges and transactions. This means that acting upon or bringing about changes or improving their practices or institutions have not yet entered into the process! The point is that implementation of programs, practices, and actions must be viewed as commodities within the flea market which are to be exchanged, with personal interaction as the most valued currency.

Transaction costs

United States consultants in their attempt to impart administrative theory and practice to Latin American countries have discovered that the costs incurred are incalculable. There is, nevertheless, the necessity to consider what the transaction costs are for both sides. The attempt should be made to assure equity. The issues to consider in this regard are those related to time and personal costs.

The use of time for Latin Americans differs from that of North Americans. First, they are not as conscious of it. The present is important, therefore, restricting an event to specific time frames is inconsis tent with their view of the use of time. The idea of beginning and ending events in relation to time is abhorrent to most Latin Americans. For example, in an attempt to prepare a half hour television program, the participants referred to its delivery as "a la marcha." They saw little importance in practicing time segments in order to assure a smooth production.

Related to the use of time is the aspect of decision-making. Planning, organizing time and work-flow charts are not valued. Instead, decisions are to be made "on the spot," or not made at all. Decisions are made in line with flea market practices, what is the best bargain? Decision-making takes place under the primary consideration of interpersonal relationships and the present. Moreover, the use of information in decision-making is highly selective and personalized.

Communication patterns in a flea market take place between those seeking bargains. The bargains are transacted on a personal basis. Interpersonal communication assumes great importance. Personal information is preferred, accepted and utilized over impersonal. Personal information utilization is determined by the distance between the interacting parties. Relatives' and friends' information is valued above that of others. Formal communication patterns are, thus, not utilized by Latin Americans for organizational functioning. Written communication, hierarchical adherence for information transmission and formal meetings are means which Latin Americans use rarely.

The use of time in terms of an organizational career in Latin America means that admission, retention, and promotion are dependent on interpersonal aspects. Competence and ability hold second place to personal relationships. Relatives and friends are more likely to hold extensive careers in organizations. Viewed differently, organizations are likely to be operated by persons attached to each other as relatives or friends, rather than by filling posts based on competence or merit.

To summarize, the use of time has been used to illustrate Latin America's cultural context (class of things and events) and how it affects both the relationship between them and the United States consultants and how it

impacts on educational administration practices.

The primacy which Latin America grants to interpersonal relationships serves to view the Latin American cultural context as a flea market. In this setting, the parties interpersonally transact a bargain on unrestricted time. The nature of the exchange, the efficiency or quality of the exchange, the incentives offered and the transaction costs are all part of the transaction process. The success of educational administration practices is determined by the degree to which these transactions are sustained. Goals, objectives, and programs serve as incentives for the transaction. Their importance increases proportionately as the interpersonal transactions diminish.

The transactions costs are related to the nature and efficiency or quality of interaction. Latin American will demand material, funds, and other goods in place of interpersonal transactions. As United States consultants reduce their time spent, their personal presence, and their interaction with Latin Americans, they will be expected to increase their allocation of material goods. This runs contrary to the intent of providing self-help to these countries.

Educational administration has been impacting Latin America in several ways. First, scholars and educational specialists have worked in the various countries attempting to train Latin Americans and to institute educational programs for Latin American citizens. Second, Latin American students and others have come to the United States to obtain training and experience in these schools. Third, researchers have been conducting comparative studies to try to understand both countries' cultures in order to derive educational administration models which may be applicable in the respective countries.

This report has presented a means to perceive Latin American organizational behavior in order to contrast it with the organizational behavior derived from western theoretical models. If administration is rooted in public cultural contexts, the practice of administration in Latin America will not be successful unless that particular cultural context is well understood.

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